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Public Health Reports

Treasury Department, United States Marine-Hospital Service. Published in accordance with act of Congress approved February 15, 1893.

VOL. XIV. WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 10, 1899. No. 10.

UNITED STATES.

ACT OF CONGRESS PROVIDING FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF LEPROSY
IN THE UNITED STATES, ETC.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service, under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, shall appoint a commission of medical officers of the Marine-Hospital Service to investigate the origin and prevalence of leprosy in the United States, and to report upon what legislation is necessary for the prevention of the spread of this disease; the expenses of this investigation, not exceeding the sum of five thousand dollars, to be paid from the fund for preventing the spread of epidemic diseases.

Approved, March 2, 1899.

Following is the report of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Quarantine, submitted by Mr. Gallinger, January 18, 1898, recommending the passage of the bill :

REPORT.

[To accompany S. 2904.]

The Committee on Public Health and National Quarantine, to whom was referred the bill (S. 2904) for the investigation of leprosy, have examined the same and report :

The reasons for the proposed legislation are fully set forth in the following letter from the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service :

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE SUPERVISING SURGEON-GENERAL
MARINE-HOSPITAL SERVICE,
Washington, D. C., January 13, 1898.

Hon. GEORGE G. VEST,
*Chairman Committee on Public Health and
National Quarantine, United States Senate.*

SIR : I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 6th instant referring to Senate bill No. 2904, with the request that I furnish your committee with

such suggestions as I may deem proper in the premises touching on the merits of the bill and the propriety of its passage.

With regard to this bill, authorizing the Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service to cause an investigation to be made relative to the origin and prevalence of leprosy in the United States, I have to state that in view of the fact that leprosy is known to exist in quite a number of places in this country there is a prevailing opinion among the sanitary authorities that there are many more of these cases than have been recorded. Moreover, there has been a confusion of ideas about the danger of its spread. In one locality the disease is reported to be slowly spreading, and each year there are noted fresh foci of the disease, while, on the other hand, the reported isolated cases are a subject of discussion as to whether they are a menace.

So far there has been no systematic inquiry made with regard to the origin and prevalence of the disease in the United States. Some valuable reports have been made of the prevalence and behavior of this disease in one or two localities. Further than this the information is imperfect and fragmentary.

That the disease is contagious no one at present will deny. The International Leprosy Conference, which met in Berlin in October last, declared that the disease is not only contagious, but when introduced into a country the history shows that it invariably spreads, each case forming a nidus of infection, and sooner or later other cases followed. This fact has been recognized by a few of the State and local authorities where there was a considerable number of cases, and restrictive measures are now enforced to prevent its further spread. In many places from which isolated cases have been reported no such measures have been generally practiced. The Marine-Hospital Service has been notified of the existence of such cases and has been requested to assume charge of them, and when it was ascertained that there was no law for such procedure these cases have been turned adrift to go wherever they pleased.

In this connection I would state that it is believed that there are many more cases of leprosy in the United States than are actually known. Recent investigation and study of the disease have demonstrated that there are quite a number of obscure forms of nervous and skin diseases which heretofore considered as separate and distinct are nothing more or less than leprosy.

Before any rational measures can be undertaken by the National Government, if such a conclusion is justifiable, it will be necessary to inquire further into the origin and prevalence of the disease, and to determine just how far it is a menace to our people.

The expenses of such inquiry would be small; a sum sufficient to meet the expenses of travel of the officers detailed to this duty would be all that is required. This could be properly paid from the fund for the prevention of epidemic diseases.

The bill meets with approval, and I would respectfully recommend that favorable action be taken thereon.

Respectfully, yours,

WALTER WYMAN,
Supervising Surgeon-General Marine-Hospital Service.

Approved:

L. J. GAGE, *Secretary.*

Your committee recommends the passage of the bill.

[Reports to the Supervising Surgeon-General United States Marine-Hospital Service.]

PORTO RICO.

Report of inspection of Arecibo.

SAN JUAN, PORTO RICO, *February 16, 1899.*

SIR: I have the honor to make the following report of an inspection of Arecibo, Porto Rico.

This port is situated 36 miles by water, and about 50 miles by rail, west of San Juan, upon an open arm of the sea, which affords no protection to vessels in case of storms.

The population of the city is given at 9,000, and the district 26,000. The usual cistern and cesspool system prevails, and the place compares favorably in appearance with our own Gulf port towns. Vessels anchor in the open roadstead, and passengers and cargoes are lightered